

Navigation Team · Portland/Multnomah County, Oregon

Because of our community's growing gap between housing costs and incomes, Portland has seen an increase in homelessness and housing insecurity. That's led to an increase in visible camping — even though Portland and Multnomah County have doubled shelter beds and housing assistance outcomes since 2015.

Current outreach teams know that many vulnerable people live in these encampments. And as an encampment grows, the potential for health and safety issues affecting campers and neighbors also grows. That's why the Portland/Multnomah County Joint Office of Homeless Services and two nonprofit service providers, Transition Projects and Central City Concern, launched a new Navigation Team in early 2019.

The team takes a services-first approach to high-impact campsites. It works over an extended period to connect campers to shelter, services, housing, and health supports, before a camp is posted for cleaning and removal — rather than continuing the cycle of posting, cleaning and having a return.

One part of a bigger picture

- The Navigation Team is part of a much larger set of strategies for helping provide housing opportunities and services to people who are unsheltered, while also addressing the impacts of unsanctioned camping.
- The Joint Office of Homeless Services funds a range of outreach services connecting people to services and housing opportunities and helping offer survival and emergency services. The doubling of year-round, public shelter capacity has also meant transforming shelter, so it works for more people. That means 24-hour access, beds for couples, a place for pets, hygiene and storage.
- The City of Portland has significantly expanded its capacity to address the public health and sanitation issues connected to unsanctioned encampments. It provides mobile assessment and cleanup services, and last year removed refuse and biohazards from more than 3,000 sites. And Multnomah County has added syringe disposal boxes in neighborhoods beyond the central city.

"Navigation" from the streets to services

- The team works with the City of Portland's Homelessness/Urban Camping Impact Reduction Program (HUCIRP) and other public agencies to address areas where high-impact camping is frequent. HUCIRP and other public agencies identify the locations where the Navigation Team is most needed.
- A multi-disciplinary team of outreach workers assesses each unsheltered person and their needs.
- The team offers access to services including shelter, health supports (medical, mental health, substance use), transportation assistance, identification and benefits assistance, and housing and rental assistance.
- That requires near-daily engagement and can take weeks. The goal is to give people time to meet with workers and reconnect with and receive services before an encampment is posted/cleaned.

Hygiene services also play an important part

- To assist the team in its work, the City of Portland may provide hygiene and storage services (including portable toilets and lockers). Those services aren't permanent and are placed in an area only while the Navigation Team is engaging there.

How locations are chosen

- The team works in one area at a time. HUCIRP, which fields and monitors reports of high-impact campsites, identifies those sites.
- Decisions are guided by data including a camp's size, geographic areas, and health/safety concerns.
- Factors also include a site's risk assessment score and whether there's a pattern of re-encampment after cleanup efforts.

What happens after the Navigation Team works in an area?

- Sites are posted and then cleaned by the Homelessness/Urban Camping Impact Reduction Program.
- Measures are taken, as appropriate, to help prevent high-impact camping from recurring. That might involve ongoing monitoring. Sometimes it means physical measures such as signs or fencing.

If you have additional questions about the Navigation Team and its work, contact johns@multco.us.

To learn more about the City of Portland's work to reduce camping impacts, go to

www.portlandoregon.gov/toolkit/.

To learn more about how Portland and Multnomah County's investments are helping thousands of people end their homelessness, so that they are no longer in encampments or even emergency shelter, go to

www.ahomeforeveryone.net.